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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard   "Saying it like it is!"
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Of course it couldn't last; we had a couple of more snowstorms this week,
but fortunately neither amounted to too much snow. Just your typical
"nuisance" storms that we get on occasion. It's been another one of those
long and cold weeks, though. Baseball's "Rite of Spring" has started, and
I can surely keep wishing that Spring was days away, rather than weeks!

It's been exactly two months since the passing of our "son" Butkus. It's
hard to believe that it's been that long already; we still miss him and
think of him daily. There's always something that triggers a comment about
him every day. Our "daughter" also misses her big brother; and we can tell
how much of a toll it's taken on her. She's been lethargic lately, and
doesn't eat like she once did. More and more we have been considering
finding a companion for her, especially with my being gone more and more
due to the "new" job. My hours are fairly sporadic, so there are numerous
times when she could be alone for a half day or more. That's something
that she's never experienced before - they were always together.

For the past few weeks, my wife and I have been browsing various animal
shelter and dog rescue sites on the web, just to see what types of dogs
were available for adoption. While neither of us was looking to "replace"
our son, we were concerned about our daughter's well-being. There is only
so much that we can do for her to fill the void ourselves. Sure, we've
given her more attention now that it doesn't have to be shared like it
once was, but that didn't seem to be the total answer. We kept returning
to the web site of the shelter where we had adopted Butkus over 11 years
ago.

My wife and I have always been advocates for homeless animals - both of
our kids were abandoned at a young age. Unwanted animals need a good home,
and many face uncertain death. The shelter we visited is a "no-kill" one,
which means that the animal remains there until adopted; they're not put
down after a certain amount of time like many shelters or animal control
facilities do. While it's true that shelters like this one occasionally
have animals that have emotional or behavioral issues due to abuse or
other factors, not all of the animals have such issues.

Anyway, we were looking at this particular shelter's site more regularly,
and were discussing the possibilities. We've been going back and forth
the idea of adopting. It's a difficult thing to decide; would adopting
mean that we were replacing our loved one? Did we want to go through a
training process all over again?   How would Buffy feel about another
sibling? And other possible issues. We decided to consider doing it,
but made some decisions on what we would seek as candidates. Buffy is

close to 12 years old, so we wanted to consider an older dog, not a puppy. We also wanted a dog that was not high-energy. A dog that would be a good companion, but not one that would be pestering her all day long wanting to play, etc.

One of the dogs that we saw on the web site was a greyhound, cut loose from a race track somewhere. He was 2 1/2 years old. Personally, I've never considered a greyhound to be "pet material" because many are usually bred for racing and not for families. This one had been at the shelter since early November, and my wife felt sorry for him being there so long - no one wanted him. There were a few other dogs that were older, but only a couple of them seemed to be less energetic and suitable for Buffy's temperament.

So, we put the two dogs together and they barely acknowledged each other's presence. We were disappointed that they didn't hit it off, but noticed that they didn't fight or growl at each other. Still, we weren't sure that this was going to be a good mix. The shelter's counselor sensed our hesitation, and suggested a temporary adoption to see if the two would warm up to each other. End result, we're planning to head back to the shelter this weekend and finalize the adoption. The two "kids" aren't the best of pals just yet, but they seem to be warming up to each other. And there's also no way that we could bring Sam back to the shelter - he's been through a lot, and he feels right at home here.

Okay, so I've gone on about dogs, er, canine children. Well, as I said, earlier, I have a soft spot for animals - especially those who have been abused and/or abandoned. Sound familiar? In comparison, all of us reading A-ONE have similar attachments - Atari computing. Did we give up on an abandoned computer platform? Are we as fond (or almost) of the Atari "species"? Sure, animals will most likely be more affectionate and stick around a lot longer, but the sentiment is similar. I will have to say, though, that dogs provide a lot more enjoyment and love - unconditionally.

Until next time...

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                        PEOPLE ARE TALKING
                      compiled by Joe Mirando
                        joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone, and I'm just aching to rant some more about politics... but I won't. Yeah, yeah, I hear you letting out that heavy sign of relief. [grin]

On a purely personal note, I'm now closer to a job than I've been in the last six months, and I'm hopeful that it pans out. It's a good job with a good company, working with good people for a good salary... and it's something I think I could do well. What more could you ask for, right? Well, I've got one final interview coming up, and then I'll find out if I get the job. The job market is a scary place right now, and anyone who finds one is damned lucky right now. Keep your fingers crossed for me, will ya? Thanks. I knew that you would. [chuckle]

There isn't a heck of a lot on the UseNet this week, but let's give it a shot anyway, okay? Here we go...

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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'GoliaTT' writes to tell us about a new website dedicated to the Atari TT030:

"A new site about Atari TT has came to being. All interested people are invited. We aim at gathering informations (as much as we can find) about 32-bit Ataris and also we want to contact TT-users with those who still make various extensions to TTs. You can join the online list and help us with developing the site. We also look for someone who can help with making German version of it.

The link to the site is: http://www.ataritt030.info "

Guillaume Tello tells GoliaTT:

"Really cool and useful data base that (I hope) will grow!

I liked the Atarians list (I joined!) and the links that everyone can add. I will add a link to your site from mine."

On the subject of replacing the clock/NVRAM chip in the Falcon030, Mark Bedingfield posts:

"The best solution is desolder and fit a socket, then fit a new chip."

'DarkLord' replies:

"Because I'm a klutz at soldering anything so fine as what seems to be on the Falcons motherboard, and I didn't want to ruin anything, I had this done by Alex Yu at ATY Computers, here in the US. Parts came from Brad Coda at Best Electronics.

Now, if the clock goes dead on my Falcon again, I can replace it myself."

'AtariNut' jumps in and says:

"So the net result then, as I understand this discussion, is that we will be able to replace our dead battery with the same type of battery that is used in windows boxes?"

Ronald Hall tells AtariNut:

"Hi. Not sure about that part - I don't know if the replacement battery is PC compatible or not. Maybe someone else can shed some light on that..."

Mark answers that it...

"Depends on the voltage. My understanding from a quick look at the cct is that it disables the chips ability to recharge. If its 3.3v then the answer is yes."

'Umberto' asks for help with his Falcon:

"My Falcon wont access any drives, but will boot up tos, any ideas?"

Mark Bedingfield tells him:

"Power supply maybe? Any icons on the desktop? Could just be a dead/dying hard drive."

Edward Baiz posts this about taking his Falcon wireless!

"I bought a Linksys Wireless modem so that I could run my two Xboxs. It all worked fine, so I decided to see if it would work with the Falcon. I was very happy that it did. I used a Linksys-B Gaming Adapter. It just plugs into any computer/gaming console that has an EtherNet connector. I just plugged the adapter into the NEC2000 and it worked. Nice to know..."

Ronald Hall asks Edward:

"So theoretically, I could take the LinkSys-B Gaming Adaptor, plug it into my EtherNEC, then into my STacy, and have a portable wireless Atari? That would be way cool."

Way cool is right! The STacy is a twenty year old machine! That rocks! Lonny Pursell adds:

"Yup. Also the D-Link DWL 810 will do the same. My TT is wireless. Same deal, its plugged into the EtherNEC. The only catch is you might have to configure these devices on a mac or such since the internal web setup utility requires a java script enabled browser."

Ronald replies:

"Okay, thanks for the info. My workplace runs a wireless "guest" network, looks like I'll be seeing if I can access that.

If I can, I'll be telling the IT director there his network is so antiquated that I can access it with a 20 year old Atari laptop... <evil laugh>   (its okay - we're friends)..."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section  - Nintendo DSi Due in April!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""    GTA IV: Lost and Damned!
                                    GI Joe Gets Deployed!
                                    And more!



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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News  -  The Latest Gaming News!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""



              Nintendo's Handheld Game Player Due April 5 in US


Nintendo Co. will launch the latest version of its portable video game
system in the United States on April 5, adding two digital cameras and the
ability to play with sound recordings.

The DSi, which is already available in Nintendo's home country of Japan,
will cost $170 and come in two colors, black and blue. This is the third
iteration of the world's most popular handheld gaming system. The DS
Lite, its predecessor, costs $130.

The new handheld is slimmer than the DS Lite, sports bigger screens and
includes two digital cameras - one facing outward and one pointing at
the user when the device is flipped open. Nintendo likened them to a set
of eyes.

"If the touch screen gave Nintendo DS a sense of feel and the microphone
allowed it to hear, the two cameras give Nintendo DSi the sense of
sight," the company said in a statement.

Using the DSi, players can manipulate photos, mix images and share them
with friends.

The launch comes as millions of people are turning to mobile games - on
the DS and on smart phones like Apple's iPhone - to pass their time.

The DSi also includes a memory card slot for users to store photos,
music and games, which players will be able to purchase and download
through the device's Wi-Fi wireless connection. A stereo headphone
output on the outside of the DSi lets users listen to music even when
the system is flipped shut.



               Grand Theft Auto IV Gets "Lost and Damned"


Take Rockstar's Grand Theft Auto IV too seriously and you'll probably miss
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most of what it's up to. It's a game, of course, but it's also a biting, unremitting satire. Juvenile-seeming to some, sure, with its lewd and frequently misogynist humor, but no less a scathing sendup of American culture when you strip the top layers away. It's a mirror, but one held up to our silly instead of our serious side. A parody of parodies. A bad-boy-burlesque. That it even offends other satirists (who take special pleasure in calling it sophomoric) simply proves its point.

And now there's a sequel of sorts called "The Lost and Damned," or a parallel narrative expansion if you want to get technical about it. But with anywhere from 15 to 40 hours of play time for just 1600 Microsoft Points ($20) it packs more to-dos than you'll find in most standalone $60 games.

It's a bold move on Rockstar's part, an experiment of sorts but also something of risk, since it's arriving as both Xbox 360-exclusive and in downloadable-only form. You can still buy the game at retail in the form of a key card, but I'd wager most gamers will circumvent the middleman. What's to benefit you tripping all the way to the mall for a glorified piece of media-less plastic?

Oh right, the Xbox 360-exclusive bit. Sorry PlayStation 3 owners, Microsoft ponied up $50 million for exclusive rights to host the expansion. I guess that's more or less what the "potential compromised PS3 sales" tally came to once the numbers were properly projected and crunched. Some have speculated it might hop platforms once Microsoft's exclusivity deal expires, but that assumes there's in fact an expiry date.

As for the game itself, think in thirds, as in one-third the story missions of the original. Nico Bellic is out, replaced by Johnny Klebitz, a 34-year-old leader in a biker gang. If you played the original, Klebitz is the guy that helps Niko watch over a heroin deal, and who later chips in on a mission involving conflict diamonds. Did I say Niko was out? Not entirely. Since Johnny and Nico's stories overlap, Nico's in for a cameo here.

In "The Lost and Damned," Klebitz is subbing for his gang leader who's in rehab, and trying to make nice with the competition. When his shoot-first-compromise-never boss gets out, however, management styles clash, leading to all sorts of familial mayhem.

Game-wise, Rockstar's added several new multiplayer modes, like "Cops vs. Bikers" (bikers try to take out a bus protected by cops) and "Chopper vs. Chopper" (helicopter vs. bike...and no, I'm not joshing). You also get a few new weapons like grenade launchers and sawed-off shotguns, and when Johnny's sitting a bike, it'll handle much more responsively than vehicles as operated by Niko. The biggest change? Mission checkpoints, which eliminate all that extra driving to and from the scene of the crime if you're offed prematurely. (Sadly, though, it's not retroactive to the main game.)

Will the "The Lost and Damned" succeed as a 360 exclusive? Probably. It's Grand Theft Auto IV, isn't it? You're looking at over 16 million Xbox 360s in the U.S. alone, with over 4 million copies sold stateside, and per my last chat with Microsoft about subscriber numbers, over two-thirds have Xbox Live Gold accounts. Potential br and new sales aside, if only half that 4 million download the expansion, it's still as many transactions as copies purchased of the U.S. PlayStation 3 original.

G.I. Joe Deployed in Videogame for First Time

Classic soldier doll G.I. Joe is reporting for duty in videogame consoles and handheld devices.

Electronic Arts (EA) said the videogame will debut in August with the release of "G.I. Joe: The Rise of COBRA," a live action film starring a hero based on the Hasbro toy.

The movie is from Paramount Pictures and Spyglass Entertainment. EA provided an early glimpse of the G.I. Joe videogame at a Toy Fair that ended Tuesday in New York City.

"EA is excited to play a major role in bringing this icon of pop culture history to a new generation of enthusiasts through interactive gaming," said EA Hasbro general manager Chip Lange.

"G.I. Joe offers exceptionally rich storylines and a cast of characters that lends itself incredibly well to creating an over-the-top action adventure videogame that will thrill gamers as well as G.I. Joe fans."

The videogame storyline will pick up where the film ends and let players re-enact scenes from the movie, according to EA. The game is being tailored for Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo videogame consoles as well as mobile devices.

"G.I. Joe has been an icon of action for 45 years," said Mark Blecher, general manager of digital gaming and media at Hasbro.

"EA has tapped the legacy of the G.I. Joe vs. COBRA saga to create an amazing interactive experience inspired by the movie, comic books, animated series and iconography."

G.I. Joe is a veteran action figure introduced in 1964. Twenty years later the toy line was expanded to include characters from a nefarious COBRA organization.

Court Strikes Down California Video Game Law

A federal appeals court on Friday struck down a California law that sought to ban the sale or rental of violent video games to minors.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the 2005 law violates minors' rights under the Constitution's First and 14th amendments. The three-judge panel's unanimous ruling upholds an earlier ruling in U.S. District Court.

The law would have prohibited the sale or rental of violent games to anyone under 18. It also would have created strict labeling requirements for video game manufacturers.

In a written opinion, Judge Consuelo Callahan said there were less restrictive ways to protect children from "unquestionably violent" video games. For example, the justices said the industry has a voluntary rating system and that parents can block certain games on video consoles.

The law's author, state Sen. Leland Yee, D-San Francisco, said he wanted Attorney General Jerry Brown to appeal the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"We need to help empower parents with the ultimate decision over whether or not their children play in a world of violence and murder," Yee, a child psychologist, said in a statement.

A spokesman for Brown could not immediately say whether California would appeal to the Supreme Court.

California lawmakers had approved the law, in part, by relying on studies suggesting violent games can be linked to aggression, anti-social behavior and desensitization to violence. The justices dismissed that research.

"None of the research establishes or suggests a causal link between minors playing violent video games and actual psychological or neurological harm, and inferences to that effect would not be reasonable," Callahan said in her ruling.

The law never took effect and was challenged shortly after it was signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. A U.S. District Court blocked it after the industry sued California over constitutional concerns.

Schwarzenegger spokeswoman Camille Anderson said the governor was reviewing Friday's ruling.

"The governor believes strongly we have a responsibility to our children and our communities to protect against the effects of video games depicting ultra-violent actions," she said.

The Encino-based Video Software Dealers Association, now known as the Entertainment Merchants Association following a merger, and the Washington, D.C.-based Entertainment Software Association argued that California's restrictions could open the door for states to limit minors' access to other material under the guise of protecting children.

The court agreed, saying California was "asking us to boldly go where no court has gone before."

"The state, in essence, asks us to create a new category of non-protected material based on its depiction of violence," Callahan wrote in the 30-page ruling.

Michael D. Gallagher, president of the Entertainment Software Association, said the ruling underscores that parents, with help from the industry, are the ones who should control what games their children play.

"This is a clear signal that in California and across the country, the reckless pursuit of anti-video game legislation like this is an exercise in wasting taxpayer money, government time and state resources," Gallagher said in a statement.

Courts in several other states have struck down similar laws.

A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Apple's Tiger Begins To Prowl, Set for Release Friday

Apple has kicked its flagship operating system into a higher gear,
temporarily stealing the thunder from arch-rival Microsoft by unleashing
Tiger with some 200 enhancements to the Mac platform that already has a
strong, cult-like following.

Among the new features is Spotlight, enabling faster, more efficient
desktop searches, and a Dashboard comprising mini-applications called
widgets that are programmed to deliver to the desktop continuous updates
on information, such as flight schedules, stock quotes and weather
forecasts.

With spotlight, users can search the entire system, including the
metadata inside files such as the type of content, the author, edit
history, format and size. Results are continuously updated as files
change, and can be stored in smart folders or smart mailboxes.

The Automator feature allows users to automate certain, repetitive
tasks, while the latest iChat application provides video conferencing
capabilities along with instant messaging.

Tiger also adds the high-definition QuickTime 7 video format and a new
version of the Safari Web browser with support for Really Simple
Syndication (RSS) data feeds.

Built on a Unix foundation, Mac OS X Tiger supports both 64-bit and
32-bit applications. Compatibility with Windows has been improved as
well, Apple announced. The cost is US$129 per user, or $199 for a Family
Pack. The official launch will be held Friday.

The much-anticipated software upgrade is touted by Apple as the answer
to Microsoft's Longhorn, a test version of which was launched by
Microsoft earlier this week. Longhorn will include similar versions of
the search and content organization features of Tiger, but Longhorn
won't be available until the end of next year.

Apple made a concerted effort to unleash Tiger before Longhorn, much to
the delight of its committed user base, but the company is fighting a
decidedly uphill battle against Microsoft, said Yankee Group analyst
Laura DiDio.

"Mac users are clamoring for this, but the question is whether Apple
will build on its core constituency," she said, noting that the company
holds a 4 percent share of the desktop OS market.

Still, in talking with I.T. administrators, DiDio said she heard from
those in the media and marketing industries, especially, that Mac is
making comeback. "The technology is user-friendly and reliable, and

those using them are pressing for Apple upgrades."

Spotlight is particularly compelling, the analyst said, describing it as both fast and elegant, and as an alternative to Longhorn's search-by-category features.

DiDio suggested that while Apple sees Microsoft as its prime target, the Mac could make inroads on the Linux user base because of its Unix-based OS. "It's proprietary software, so there is indemnification protection, and Unix may be seen as a more reliable platform than Windows."

New York Governor Proposes Internet Tax on Downloads

New York Governor David Paterson has proposed a tax on Internet downloads, a spokesman said Monday, in a move that has raised eyebrows because it could apply to everything from software to pornography.

The four percent tax would apply to downloads of music, software, books, videos and other Internet content, a spokesman for Paterson said.

"It is a general proposal, not focused on the content, so it would apply to any download, regardless of the content," said Errol Cockfield.

The governor has floated the idea as a way of closing the state's 15 billion dollar budget deficit, but critics say the proposal would likely apply to the hugely lucrative Internet pornography industry and could even drive business away from the state.

"By taxing it you're legitimizing it," New York Conservative Party Chairman Michael Long told the New York Daily News.

Around 20 US states have begun to apply a tax to downloads such as music on iTunes, and similar measures are being mulled in Mississippi, North Dakota and Wisconsin.

US Faces Growing Cyberattacks

The number of reported cyberattacks on US government computer networks rose by more than 40 percent last year, USA Today reported on Tuesday.

The newspaper, citing data obtained from the US Computer Emergency Readiness Team (US-CERT), said there were 5,488 tracked incidents of unauthorized access to US government computers and installations of hostile programs in 2008.

There were a combined 3,928 such incidents in 2007, USA Today said, and 2,172 in 2006.

"Government systems are under constant attack," the newspaper quoted Joel Brenner, counterintelligence chief in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, as saying.

"We're seeing ... a dramatic, consistent increase in cyber crime (and) intelligence activities," Brenner added.

USA Today said more infiltrators were trying to plant malicious software on US government computer systems in a bid to control or steal sensitive data.

The newspaper also said the data obtained from US-CERT may represent only a "small sampling" of the total number of incidents because "just one percent of federal agencies have fully developed tracking systems."

At the same time, some of the increase may reflect better reporting, it quoted Mischel Kwon, who heads US-CERT at the Department of Homeland Security, as saying.

US President Barack Obama last week ordered a sweeping review of US cybersecurity to protect the government's information technology systems from security and economic threats.

The 60-day review is to be overseen by Melissa Hathaway, a former official in George W. Bush's administration who coordinated cyber monitoring for the director of national intelligence.

During the election campaign, Obama equated cyber risks to the threat of nuclear or biological attack and promised a high-level review if he became president.

A congressional panel warned in November that China had developed a sophisticated cyber warfare program and stepped up its capacity to penetrate US computer networks to extract sensitive information.

And a December report by the Commission on Cybersecurity for the 44th Presidency told the new leader that cybersecurity was "among the most serious economic and national security challenges we will face in the 21st century."

Conficker Worm Gets an Evil Twin

The criminals behind the widespread Conficker worm have released a new version of the malware that could signal a major shift in the way the worm operates.

The new variant, dubbed Conficker B++, was spotted three days ago by SRI International researchers, who published details of the new code on Thursday. To the untrained eye, the new variant looks almost identical to the previous version of the worm, Conficker B. But the B++ variant uses new techniques to download software, giving its creators more flexibility in what they can do with infected machines.

Conficker-infected machines could be used for nasty stuff - sending spam, logging keystrokes, or launching denial of service (DoS) attacks, but an ad hoc group calling itself the Conficker Cabal has largely prevented this from happening. They've kept Conficker under control by cracking the algorithm the software uses to find one of thousands of rendezvous points on the Internet where it can look for new code. These rendezvous points use unique domain names, such as pwulrrog.org, that the Conficker Cabal has worked hard to register and keep out of the hands of the criminals.

The new B++ variant uses the same algorithm to look for rendezvous points, but it also gives the creators two new techniques that skip them altogether. That means that the Cabal's most successful technique could be bypassed.

Conficker underwent a major rewrite in December, when the B variant was released. But this latest B++ version includes more subtle changes, according to Phil Porras, a program director with SRI. "This is a more surgical set of changes that they've made," he said.

To put things in perspective: There were 297 subroutines in Conficker B; 39 new routines were added in B++ and three existing subroutines were modified, SRI wrote in a report on the new variant. B++ suggests "the malware authors may be seeking new ways to obviate the need for Internet rendezvous points altogether," the report states.

Porras could not say how long Conficker B++ has been in circulation, but it first appeared on Feb. 6, according to a researcher using the pseudonym Jart Armin, who works on the Hostexploit.com Web site, which has tracked Conficker.

Though he does not know whether B++ was created in response to the Cabal's work, "it does make the botnet more robust and it does mitigate some of the Cabal's work," Support Intelligence CEO Rick Wesson said in an e-mail interview.

Also known as Downadup, Conficker spreads using a variety of techniques. It exploits a dangerous Windows bug to attack computers on a local area network, and it can also spread via USB devices such as cameras or storage devices. All variants of Conficker have now infected about 10.5 million computers, according to SRI.

New Attacks Target IE7 Flaw

Internet attack trackers and antivirus companies warn that a flaw in Internet Explorer 7 (but not earlier versions) that Microsoft just patched last week is under attack in the wild. The attacks appear to be targeted and small-scale right now, but will likely grow.

Trend Micro describes a somewhat roundabout attack that starts with an e-mailed .doc file that, when opened, exploits the MS09-002 vulnerability to download and install remote-control backdoor malware.

Trend writes that this approach is likely part of a targeted attack. Such assaults typically involve more legwork on the part of crooks to construct a realistic spam message that may appear to come from a co-worker, for instance, and have a poisoned .doc or other file attached.

But the Internet Storm Center warns that while antivirus vendors currently only report .doc-using attacks, "there is absolutely nothing preventing attackers from using the exploit in a drive-by attack." And they expect that to happen very soon.

The good news is that to protect yourself, you only need to make sure you've closed the hole by applying last week's patch. It was distributed via Automatic Updates, so you can double-check that you got it by running Windows Update. Or head to the Microsoft security bulletin.

Howls of Protest Greet Tango Email

An email promoting a tango concert set off howls of protest in offices across Washington on Tuesday as recipients seeking to unsubscribe were hit by a flood of further unsolicited messages.

It started innocuously enough with an email from the Pan Am Symphony Orchestra to a list of email addresses in the Washington area announcing a March 1 concert of tango music.

As with many promotional emails, appended to the bottom of the message was the option to "unsubscribe" from the list.

As user after user, however, asked that they be removed from the Pan Am Symphony email list, their request was sent to all of the other recipients on the list.

It was not immediately clear if this was because they were also hitting the "reply to all" button or if the unsubscribe request was looping the email back to all of the members of the list.

Lawyers, lobbyists, journalists, defense contractors and think-tank members were among those demanding with increasing indignation that they be removed from the list.

"This is a US government agency - remove this address from your records," said one message from a Federal Trade Commission attorney.

"It would be great if these unsubscribe messages did not copy every one else on the distribution," wrote another recipient.

An Agence France-Presse reporter received more than 100 unsubscribe messages from other users over the course of a few hours.

One recipient had a proposal for their new "friends."

"This has been great. Do you guys all want to get together for a drink?"

eBay Renames 'Yellow Star' After 'Nazi' Complaint

Internet auction house eBay has temporarily renamed the yellow stars it uses to evaluate sellers on its French site after a complaint that the symbol had anti-semitic connotations.

The move came after French eBay user Dominique Bellamy wrote to the company earlier this month to point out that during World War II the Nazis made Jews wear a yellow star on their clothes as a discriminatory mark.

His wife Francoise Bellamy told AFP Thursday that her husband "refused to be be given a yellow star, even a virtual one.

"It brought back bad memories of the occupation" of France by Germany

during World War II, she said.

eBay's star system is used to show how many positive ratings a buyer or seller has received from the site's users. The yellow star is the lowest of the 12-point scale, and a silver shooting star is the top score.

On the company's French site the lowest rating was shown Thursday as a yellow star, but was listed as a "first star" (in French, "premiere etoile").

But on English language versions the lowest rank was still called the yellow star.

eBay said in an email to AFP that "the yellow star is part of a series of achievement stars that eBay users get. This system is used worldwide on all eBay sites."

It said that "no definitive change has been decided yet" on future use in France of the yeollow star, and that "there have been no such complaints in other countries."

Electronic Evidence Firm Grilled Over Absent Memos

Guidance Software Inc. bills itself as the leading provider of technology that helps companies dig up old e-mails and other electronic documents that might be evidence in a lawsuit. Yet when Guidance itself had to face a judge, it was accused of bumbling its internal digital search.

Whether Guidance intentionally hid documents or just couldn't find them is a matter of dispute. The company said it did all that was required. But its inability to cough up certain e-mails, even over several months, led an arbitrator to accuse it of gross negligence and proceeding in bad faith.

At the very least, the case shows how thorny electronic evidence searches can be, even for a specialist.

The mountains of digital information piling up on hard drives and backup tapes have made discovery - the exchange of information between parties at the start of a lawsuit - increasingly complex. "E-discovery" software and services boomed from a $40 million business in 1999 to nearly $2.8 billion in 2007, according to George Socha and Tom Gelbmann, directors of the industry group Electronic Discovery Resource Model.

Pasadena, Calif.-based Guidance Software is one of the largest software specialists, with sales of $89 million over the last four quarters. The company began in 1997 making tools to help criminal investigators search computer hard drives. In recent years Guidance added new programs for scouring corporate networks for digital evidence.

Guidance needed to turn that expertise on itself in a case involving its former marketing director, Cassondra Todd.

Todd believed Guidance's chairman pressured her manager to fire her, in part because she is a woman. After she got a scathing performance review in 2007, she asked for an investigation.

"I was quite confident that whatever information was produced would wipe clean what was going on," Todd said in an interview. "That's what we did for a living."

But Guidance told Todd it found no evidence of discrimination. It apologized for the harshness of the review but wouldn't delete it from her file.

Todd responded by hiring Arnold Peter, an attorney with Los Angeles-based Raskin Peter Rubin & Simon. A few weeks later, she was laid off.

Todd filed a wrongful-termination claim, and both sides were required to perform discovery, a hunt for documents that might matter to the case.

The results of Guidance's initial run of e-discovery seemed scant to Todd. She expected to see far more e-mails from her days in the company. But she couldn't argue Guidance was holding back - intentionally or not - until she got a break a few months later.

Tim Leehealey, Todd's first manager at Guidance and now the head of a rival company, had printed and saved some memos from the time of Todd's bad performance review. When Todd reviewed his stash, she found e-mails about her that Guidance hadn't turned over. In one, Leehealey questioned whether someone in the company was setting Todd up to be fired.

"Other than (Guidance Chairman Shawn McCreight's) hatred of her, she was a good employee and produced for me," he wrote to Victor Limongelli, now Guidance's chief executive.

Whether Guidance didn't find Leehealey's memos or whether it chose not to hand them over, "either one was extremely damning," Leehealey said in an interview.

"Those documents were on people's hard drives for sure, and they didn't produce them," said Leehealey, whose company, AccessData Inc., tried to buy Guidance last year but was turned down.

The arbitrator handling Todd's case, a retired judge, ordered Guidance to do a more thorough round of e-discovery. The company came back empty-handed - except for news that one of its e-mail backup tapes had been corrupted. The arbitrator lost patience.

"I want this game-playing stopped," the arbitrator, William McDonald, told Guidance's attorney, according to a court transcript.

McDonald stopped short of saying Guidance was sitting on a smoking gun. But he was disturbed that Todd kept identifying documents the company hadn't unearthed. When he learned the corrupted backup tape had purportedly gone unnoticed for nearly a year, he had harsh words for the company.

"These are routine things in this business. And it wasn't done until pulling and screaming and kicking and facing the ultimate sanction," McDonald said, referring to his option to end the case in Todd's favor. "We're looking at people who should be very sophisticated in this area, given Guidance's business."

As punishment, McDonald ordered the company to pay for Todd's expert witnesses and her travel costs, plus the cost of rescheduling the trial.

He also forced Guidance to search the backups, despite its arguments that it would take weeks, amounting to a task Guidance would charge customers $100,000 to perform.

In an interview, Limongelli said he didn't know in detail why Guidance didn't initially find many of the files Todd identified as missing, though he blamed a lost laptop for one oversight. Guidance executives also say the company was not legally required to search its backup tapes at first, given the expense of reading them.

"It wasn't an attempt to hide any information," Limongelli said. "We think we followed what is a quite normal course."

Some experts not involved with the case said there is support for Guidance's argument about the backup tapes. Under federal rules, all electronically stored information is potentially discoverable. But the rules distinguish between "reasonably accessible" files and ones that are too expensive to tackle, at least in initial e-discovery. Backup tapes often count as overly burdensome, said Scott Carlson, co-chair of e-discovery for the law firm Seyfarth Shaw.

Outside experts hired by Todd gave the arbitrator more critical assessments of Guidance's actions.

Brett Harrison, a director in FTI Consulting Inc.'s electronic evidence consulting group, wrote that the way Guidance saved documents once it knew of Todd's legal actions "was not performed to commonly accepted standards within the e-discovery field and in great part did not occur at all."

A second expert, William Moylan of Aon Consulting Inc., questioned why Guidance asked that deleted files be ignored during discovery because hunting for them would be a burden.

"Recovery and searching of deleted files is at the very heart of computer forensics," he wrote.

Ultimately, the arbitrator found enough information to decide in Todd's favor. He awarded her more than $300,000, about twice her annual compensation. A federal court is also set to consider whether Todd should receive damages under separate laws that prohibit discrimination. With most of the facts of Todd's dismissal already established, her attorney plans to focus on whether Guidance attempted to thwart e-discovery during arbitration.

Guidance was "egregiously in violation of everything they report to be best practices," Todd says. "They had every resource at their disposal. They didn't want to take it seriously."

ISP Bill Would Lengthen Data-Retention Requirements

Two leading Republican lawmakers from Texas, Sen. John Cornyn and Rep. Lamar Smith, have filed identical legislation in their houses of Congress that would require a broad range of Internet service providers to maintain logs of user data for up to two years.

The bills, known as the Internet Stopping Adults Facilitating the

Exploitation of Today's Youth Act (or Internet SAFETY Act), are designed to enhance the federal government's fight against the producers and distributors of child pornography. In addition to the data-retention policies, the act would establish new penalties of 10 years for people who set up Web servers to distribute child pornography and 20 years for those who fund such activities. The act would also double the funds for the FBI's anti-child pornography initiative, Innocent Images.

At a press conference with Smith and law-enforcement agents, Cornyn urged support for the legislation. "While the Internet has generated many positive changes in the way we communicate and do business," Cornyn said, "its limitless nature offers anonymity that has opened the door to criminals looking to harm innocent children. Keeping our children safe requires cooperation on the local, state, federal and family level."

But critics are already raising concerns about the bill's broad language, particularly with respect to the definition of Internet service provider. The bill applies to any "provider of an electronic communication service or remote computing service," which could conceivably be interpreted to include everyone from the largest ISP down to an individual who has set up a Wi-Fi network at home.

While most national or regional ISPs have the capability to collect and store IP address information associated with specific users, such record-keeping may be beyond the capability of smaller access providers, like coffee shops with free Wi-Fi. Homeowners might have an even more difficult time complying.

In an op-ed piece in the Dallas Morning News on Thursday, however, Smith compared IP address logs to the logs of telephone numbers that phone companies are required to maintain. "If we require phone companies to retain this same type of information," Smith said, "there is no reason why the law should not be updated to include ISPs."

"Law-enforcement officials should have the tools they need to fight crime, whether committed over the phone, through the mail, or online."

But as numerous privacy advocates have pointed out, the information stored by the typical ISP in its IP address log is often far more revealing than mere phone numbers. For instance, it's not uncommon for the log files to include search terms or e-mail addresses in addition to IP addresses visited by each user. That makes IP log files potentially far more intrusive than phone-number registers, which merely contain the numbers called or received.

There is also the issue of who might have access to the information and under what circumstances. A number of major music and video copyright holders, including Time Warner, Sony Pictures, Walt Disney and EMI, have long been on record as supporting longer IP address retention requirements. The increased availability of such data would be a big help in copyright-enforcement actions against online file sharers.

Facebook Has Removed 5,500 Sex Offenders Since May

Facebook has removed more than 5,500 convicted sex offenders from its social networking Web site since May, Connecticut's attorney general said Thursday.

Richard Blumenthal said the world's largest social networking site, which claims to have more than 175 million active members, reported to his office that 5,585 convicted sex offenders were found on the Web site and removed between May 1, 2008, and Jan. 31, 2009.

"The message in this number is Facebook has an equal stake in solving this problem of protecting children," said Blumenthal, who along with North Carolina Attorney General Roy Cooper has led an effort remove sex offenders from the social networking Web sites.

"They have an equal stake in the predator problem and its solution."

Earlier this month, rival networking site MySpace announced it had removed 90,000 sex offenders in a two-year period.

Last year, the attorneys general got both sites to implement dozens of safeguards, including finding better ways to verify users' ages and putting limits on older users' ability to search the profiles of members under 18.

Chris Kelly, Facebook's chief privacy officer, said the convicted sexual offenders on the site were found through user reports, working with local law enforcement agencies and using the national sex offender registry.

He said Facebook's focus on members using their real names and identities helps discourage sex offenders, and even more is being planned to prevent them from registering. Earlier this month, Facebook officials said policy dictated that no convicted sex offender be allowed to keep a Facebook page.

Kelly said the company has pitched a proposal to attorneys general around the country to develop a real-time system cross-checking available outlets and "block any registration from the get-go."

"Our policy has been to remove convicted sex offenders when they are reported or identified through any means," Kelly said.

Delay Expected in Bids for New Internet Addresses

Bids for new Internet addresses to rival ".com" and other suffixes will likely be delayed until the end of the year as a key oversight agency grapples with trademark and security issues.

Draft guidelines for the new suffixes generated so much comment that the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, or ICANN, needs more time to sort out what it terms "overarching issues."

Those include whether trademark owners could wind up having to register thousands of new domain names simply to protect their intellectual-property rights. For instance, the $185,000 application fee would likely deter casual bidders from seeking, say, a ".disney" Web suffix, but the Walt Disney Co. might feel pressured to register "disney.nyc," "disney.bank" and scores of others under each of the new names, simply to keep them away from others.

Other concerns include whether new suffixes could encourage more scams involving fake Web sites that look legitimate, and whether new suffixes would even get much use.

Some of the forthcoming discussions should address concerns raised by the U.S. Commerce Department, which has significant sway because ICANN gets its powers through a government contract. ICANN cannot add any domain names without approval from the department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

ICANN had wanted to start taking applications for new names early this year, but the timetable proved too ambitious given the extent of the feedback. ICANN now expects to open bids around December.

"It is very important to take the time to resolve these overarching issues," said Paul Twomey, ICANN's chief executive.

ICANN plans to post a new draft by Thursday clarifying and expanding on some of the proposed guidelines. Among the changes, a new foundation would be set up to collect any money raised through auctions that are planned for resolving conflicts when more than one applicant seeks the same domain name. The foundation would support research and other tasks related to running the domain name system.

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